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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000343

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO USAID

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SUBJECT: ASSOCIATIONS LAW AMENDMENTS STUCK IN JORDAN'S
CABINET

REF: 08 AMMAN 3386

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Despite pressure to amend Jordan's controversial 2008 Associations Law, which restricts foreign funding and creates bureaucratic hurdles for local NGOs, amendments proposed by civil society failed to obtain cabinet approval before the end of parliament's ordinary session. Following cabinet approval, the amendments will now likely appear in a summer extraordinary session of parliament. The law came into force in December, but the Ministry of Social Development has refrained from putting forward implementing regulations. In the absence of implementing regulations or movement on the amendments, both the government and NGOs are adhering to the status quo ante. End Summary.

The State of Play

¶2. (C) During meetings with Prime Minister Nader Al-Dahabi and Royal Court Chief Nasser Al-Lozi over the past several weeks, the Ambassador has asked for status updates on amendments to Jordan's controversial Associations Law, emphasizing once again the importance the USG attaches to their passage. The law, which passed in July 2008 and entered into force in December, centralizes registry and oversight of non-governmental organizations in the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) and includes a requirement that any foreign funds be approved by Jordan's cabinet (reftel). The current MOSD Minister, Hala Lattouf, drafted the law because of long-standing complaints about the need for centralized, consistent oversight of NGOs. Lattouf's version of the legislation, however, was significantly modified by security-minded conservatives during the consultative process, leading to complaints by civil society and an eventual promise by the PM for amendments.

¶3. (C) According to Lozi, the PM asserted that the amendments were making slow but steady progress in the interagency process. Lozi said that they failed to advance to parliament during the ordinary session (which ends on February 5) due to ongoing negotiations over details of the amendments within the cabinet. He hinted that they could appear during an extraordinary session that has yet to be scheduled but would likely occur in June or July. Post's contact in the Legislative and Opinion Bureau, which must vet any proposed law before it is sent the full Cabinet and then to parliament, said on January 21 that the law has not yet been submitted for internal legal review.

¶4. (C) Regulations needed to implement the Associations Law have yet to be issued by the Ministry of Social Development

(MOSD). As reported reftel, MOSD was waiting to issue the regulations on the assumption that they would need to be overhauled once the promised amendments were enacted. Our NGO contacts have not been notified of any new requirements relating to the new law and are still waiting for the process to play out.

Assisting Implementation

15. (SBU) One of the law's positive impacts will be to centralize registration and oversight of NGOs in the Ministry of Social Development. USAID, through its Civil Society Strengthening Program, has been providing behind-the-scenes assistance to MOSD as it prepares to take on this responsibility. In addition to advising the ministry on best practices from other countries, USAID contractors are developing an online, fully automated process through which civil society organizations can register with the appropriate ministries. The site, which is expected to be operational by August 2010, will be linked to all relevant ministries so as to make the registration process as simple as possible. USAID will also be providing grants to local organizations to train lawyers to provide legal aid to NGOs that encounter difficulties in registering or maintaining their legal status under the new law.

Comment

16. (C) The PM stressed that he remains committed to the passage of amendments. Yet he has repeatedly failed to follow up with concrete action after similar promises to Jordanian civil society in the last several months. Part of this can be chalked up to the PM's cautious nature, but he

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may also fear that the amendments would be defeated or unconstructively altered in parliament. Until there is forward movement on the amendments and/or the regulations, NGOs and government regulators will continue to adhere to the system which existed prior to the law's passage.

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